



Melbourne Fringe Festival presents

The Whisper



Photo: Denise Martin

15 to 23 October 2022
Festival Hub: Trades Hall – The Studio

The Whisper

writer – Brodie Murray

director – Maryanne Sam

dramaturg/ mentor – Glenn Shea

dramaturg – Mari Lourey

producer – Sarah James

set design – Robyne Latham

set builder – Jim Stenson

lighting design/ stage management – Shane Grant

photographer – Denise Martin

Cast

Riley – Benjamin Fei

Jack – Jaeden Williams

Voice of Policeman – Greg Fryer

Nan Rose – Auntie Nellie Flagg

Pop Ray – Greg Fryer

This project received Cash to Create through the Fringe Fund, as part of Deadly Fringe. Supported by Craig Semple and Paul & Angela Wheelton.

Supported by the Australia Council for the Arts.

Writer's Note

I started work on *The Whisper* earlier this year, whilst visiting regional NSW and visiting family. I was very grateful to find out about the Deadly Fringe Commission opportunity. I thought on it for a couple of weeks about what kind of story I could write that was going to honour family, and honour this new project. After speaking with my parents, I decided to do some research into a story which we've known about for some time through Dad's family. My nan, Lorraine Murray making a journey in the 1940s with her family from Bordertown, South Australia under the cover of night to evade the welfare, finally arriving in Swan Hill, Victoria. A story of strength. A story of survival in those harsh times for Indigenous people, for Blak people.

I wanted to interview Nan to find out more about this story. Back in March, we were having a cuppa with her around the table in Balranald where she lives. We did an informal interview where she spoke about this journey on horse and cart, taken under the cover of night, and her recollection of what happened. This interview was the inspiration for this play, which I have called *The Whisper*.

I wanted to write this play to honour family, to honour legacy, to honour the stories of survival of people from South Eastern Australia, and in Victoria also. I felt like I wanted to shed a light in this story about how tough it was for Aboriginal people, First Nations people to survive. And how we have survived, and how we as a people and as families come together to survive. And I wanted to tell this story to honour Nan and to honour her journey.

In writing this play, I have been mentored by Uncle Glenn Shea, a Ngarrindjeri and Wathaurong playwright, director and actor. I've been very grateful to him for taking the time to mentor me and help mould the writing and guide me in the drafting period. I'd also like to thank Mari Lourey who was co-dramaturg with Uncle Glenn, who also provided support with the dramaturgy and putting the story together. I would like to thank them for their contribution. I would also like to thank Aunty Maryanne Sam for coming on board with the project as Director. I'm very grateful to be working with her and feel very lucky to have a strong team around me supporting the presentation of this new work.

Thank you to my nan, Lorraine Murray. To my grandmother, Karina James. And to both the Murray and James families. To Melbourne Fringe Festival and the Australia Council for the Arts for supporting me to develop as an Artist.

Brodie Murray
October 2022

Benjamin Fei (actor)



Ben is Yorta Yorta/ Wamba Wamba. He has been acting since high school having played the role of Kenickie from Grease. His first professional role was with Ilbijerri Theatre Company in Richard Frankland's Conversations with the Dead in 2019. The Whisper is Ben's second professional foray into acting. Ben is a keen sportsman and enjoys soccer and boxing. In his spare time, Ben writes for animation.

Auntie Nellie Flagg (actor)



Aunty Nellie is a descendant and traditional landowner of Wemba Wemba, Dja Dja Wurrung and Boonwurrung; and is a respected member of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in Victoria. Nellie has worked for and with First Nations peoples for over 30 years in a range of organisations to engage communities with service providers, including time as a Community Liaison Officer at Relationships Australia. Aunty Nellie has completed a Diploma in Narrative Therapy. The Tree of Life was developed through working and counselling with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities with Nunkuwarrin Yunti between 2008 and 2010. Auntie Nellie has used this activity with a number of groups including the Stolen Generation and Aboriginal girls experiencing issues in their lives and communities.

Greg Fryer (actor)



Greg is a Walpri man raised by Murries in Mianjin and has lived in Wurundjeri for 25 yrs. He has been active in theatre, film and music upon leaving school in 1985. This has included being a broadcaster on Murri Radio 4zzz (Now BIMA) & 3CR. His production work has included events such as Share The Spirit, Sydney Road Street Party, Smith Street Dreaming Festival, Australasian World Music Expo and lots of La Mama. Greg has had a very fulfilling career both in stage & screen. Some of his credits include Dr Blake Murder mysteries, The Sapphires, Mad as Hell, and has been an active member of the Llyod Jones Ensemble for the last 24 years.

Shane Grant (lighting designer)



Shane has been acknowledged as an “Absolute Genius” (Theatre People, 30/7/16) for his lighting design of Sarah Kane’s *4:48 Psychosis*. Shane earned a Bachelor of Arts (Performing Arts) from the Victorian College of the Arts, Melbourne University, some time ago. Shane is an artistic director with Metanoia theatre. Shane has: toured the world; operated venues and technically managed venues (Gasworks, Mechanics Institute Brunswick, St Martins); written shows; performed shows; sold tickets to shows; produced shows; sold drinks in the foyer at shows; built sets; built theatres; and given the St Crispin’s Day speeches that get everyone over the line on opening night—sometimes all with the same production. Some recent notable shows that Shane has designed are: Samah Sabawi’s *Tales of a City by the Sea, Them* (La Mama Courthouse and tour), *Hard boiled bush noir* (Playwright - Ruby Tout Theatre Theatre), *Scream Bloody Murder* (Abbotsford Convent), *Wages of Fear* (Playwright - Metanoia Theatre at the Mechanic’s Institute), *Toorak Rules* (St Martins Theatre), *Last Words* (Kadimah Cultural Centre), *Death of a salesman* (45 Downstairs) and *Hotel Sorrento* (national tour).

Sarah James (producer)



Sarah is a fiddler/ vocalist/ educator who performs as part of the Celtic-Indigenous folk music duo, Kinja with her husband didgeridoo musician Ron Murray. Sarah is proud to be producing *The Whisper* for Melbourne Fringe. It has been a privilege to work with the cast and team in bringing this important story to the stage.

Robyne Latham (design consultant)



Robyne Latham is a Yamatji/Caucasian woman, though originally from Western Australia she has lived and worked in Melbourne for some thirty-five years. Robyne’s career traverses two paths, her work within the university sector and her art-practice. Robyne’s art works are collected national and internationally. Her most recent art-works include: The set design, props and costumes for Maryanne Sam’s play ***Coconut Woman***, premiered Melbourne’s Yirramboi Festival 2021; Royal Children’s Hospital 150 Public Artwork, titled LEAF, a four-meter Bronze unveiled in 2021; Biennale Havana Cuba. April 2019 titled: ***‘Everyone is an Artist’ Joseph Beuys***. Robyne is currently creating a bronze sculpture 2.6 metre height, titled ‘ORCHID’ which will find its home at the Greensborough Train Station.

Mari Lourey (dramaturg)



Mari Lourey is an award winning playwright, theatre maker and dramaturg with a particular interest in working outside traditional methodologies, particularly when it enables voices and stories beyond the traditional mainstream to be heard. Working between Melbourne and Broome WA where she coordinates Goolarri Media's Indigenous Writers Program, she was Writer-in-Residence at Melbourne's University's Union House Theatre in 2018/'20. As dramaturg she has worked on numerous independent projects as well as Playwriting Australia, Ilbjerri. La Mama and Yirra Yaakin Theatre Companies. Critically acclaimed plays include: *Dirty Angels*, *Bare Witness*, *The Bridge* and most recently *Dirt Cloud*, winner of the Rodney Seaborne, Ross Trust and runner up in the inaugural 2022 Brennan playwriting awards, AWG.

Brodie Murray (writer)



Brodie is a Wamba Wamba playwright and performer, of Scottish Australian heritage. A 2020 graduate of WAAPA in Aboriginal Performance, Brodie is the recipient of the *Best Emerging Indigenous Artist Award*, and the *Young Creatives Award*, (Melbourne Fringe Festival 2021) and the Australia Council for the Arts *First Nations Emerging Career Development Award* (First Nations Arts Awards 2022). In May 2021, Brodie's play *Soul of Possum* was premiered at the YIRRAMBOI Festival, directed by Beng Oh, with dramaturgy by Declan Furber Gillick. Brodie performed the role of warrior, Dindi in the YIRRAMBOI Festival season. His play *Billy's Choice* debuted at Melbourne Fringe, adapted for film by cinematographer Davide Michielin, directed by Rachael Maza, with dramaturgy by Geoff Kelso. Brodie performed the role of Billy. He was a writer for ILBIJERRI's '10 in 10' 2021 script commissions. Brodie is a current student at Melbourne University; he is an Alumni of Melbourne Theatre Company First People Young Artist Program, and a writer for their 2022 First Stage playwrights' program, supported by the Emerging Writers Festival.

Maryanne Sam (director)



(Meriam - Erub Island, Torres Strait).

Maryanne is a founding member of Ilbjerri Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Theatre Company, Melbourne. She has worked in numerous capacities over the last thirty years+ including general manager, production manager, MC, actor, singer/songwriter, producer, director and writer. Maryanne has a Master of Arts in Writing for Performance, VCA Melbourne Uni. Some of her credits include **Coconut Woman** Yirramboi Festival 2021, (Blak and Bright First Nations Literary Festival, Yellamundie Playwriting Festival, Syd.) **Viral** (Ilbjerri Theatre) **The Audition** development and **Poetic Licence** (Outer Urban Productions) **Lessons in Flight** (Darlinghurst Theatre Company, Syd.) (Festival of The Dreaming,) (The ANPC, Newcastle Sydney,) **Forget Me Not** (JUTE Theatre Cairns) and **Casting Doubts** (Malthouse/Ilbjerri Theatre) (New York based Aust. Aboriginal Theatre Initiative.) Maryanne is recipient of an Ozco ATSIAB Fellowship and was awarded the inaugural Ilbjerri Theatre's **Uncle Bob Maza Award** for 'Outstanding Contribution to Victorian Theatre'.

Glenn Shea (dramaturg/mentor)



Glenn Shea is a proud Wathaurong/Ngarrindjeri man. An acclaimed, award-winning playwright, director and performer Glenn was the first Aboriginal person to graduate from NIDA with a degree in Dramatic Art. He is a retired frontline Koorie youth justice worker from Wathaurong Aboriginal Cooperative. His current dramatic work, **An Indigenous Trilogy**, has been in cultural development for over two decades, receiving accolades at various stages. It is a project that culminates years of research, sensitive community outreach, presentation to Elders and young people, careful planning, consideration for First Nations stories, song and dance and artistic development, into an epic presentation for the stage at La Mama theatre to be presented in November 2022. Glenn directed *The Black Woman of Gippsland*, a play in development by Andrea James for Melbourne Theatre Company and his play *Mi:Wi 3027*, presented as part of Adelaide Fringe 2021. In addition to his cultural and theatrical accolades, Glenn created an educational resource called The Storyteller. The Storyteller Board game has been used with a varied range of individuals and groups around Australia, spanning school-aged children to government departments.

Jaeden Williams (actor)



Jaeden Williams is a proud Yalukit Wilam man of the Boonwurrung. As an experienced Indigenous cultural workshop facilitator and industry mentor, Jaeden has worked as an educator at kindergartens, primary schools, universities, organisations, and arts festivals across Australia

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